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DIVERSITY MATTERS:

INTERSECTIONALITY AND WOMEN'S REPRESENTATION IN THE US AND UK

Abstract

Women's organisations can help address some specific challenges faced by different groups of women during the political recruitment process. This article explores whether US and UK organisations do so. Legislative composition analysis confirms women of colour are under-represented, although they are better represented in the US than UK; women with disabilities are under-represented in both countries, along with younger women in the US and older women in the UK. Interviews with US women's organisations reveal a greater attention to diversity, particularly with regards women of colour; however, the focus remains on increasing overall number of women in both countries.

Keywords: Diversity; intersectionality; political representation; women.

Campaigns for more women to be elected tend to treat women as a homogenous group: the focus is on increasing the *number* of women elected, not the *diversity* of those women (Smooth, 2006; Hardy-Fanta, 2011; Durose et al, 2013). Women's organisations, both partisan and non-partisan, have a role to play in shaping narratives for increasing women's presence (Young, 2000), and in helping to address some of the issues facing specific groups of women. This article takes up this issue by exploring the extent to which they prioritise diversity amongst women and whether this differs between the US and UK. The research maps and compares the diversity of women politicians in Congress and the House of Commons according to ethnicity, sexuality, disability and age. In line with previous studies,

the data confirms that women of colour remain under-represented in both countries, although they are better represented in the US than in the UK; women with disabilities are under-represented in both countries whilst younger women are under-represented in the US and older women in the UK. In explaining these patterns the article considers the extent to which campaigns to increase women's representation promote diversity, it does this by exploring partisan campaigns and through analysis of interviews undertaken with eight national women's organisations. The research finds that women's organisations in the US have a greater awareness of the need to promote diversity, principally in relation to the recruitment of women of colour. Although the focus in both the US and UK remains increasing the overall number of women politicians rather than improving diversity amongst women.

Analyses of descriptive representation, the extent to which the representative resembles the represented (Pitkin, 1967: 60), have primarily focussed on the under-representation of women and ethnic minorities (Mansbridge, 1999). Both literatures draw upon similar arguments: that increasing the presence of marginalized groups is central to equality, justice, accountability and the establishment of trust between citizens and legislatures (Young, 1990; Mansbridge, 1999: 628). There is a difference of emphasis in studies of descriptive representation in the US and UK. In the US, studies have focussed equally on women and minorities, whereas in the UK the principal focus has been women. This difference can partly be explained by the historical legacy of slavery and ongoing importance of race as a political cleavage in US society (Tate, 2003); moreover, it was black feminist scholars in the US who developed and institutionalised intersectionality as a means by which to analyse the interactive effects of inequalities based upon group characteristics

(Crenshaw, 1989; Collins, 2000), which has meant that intersectionality has played a much more central role in feminist debate in the US relative to the UK (Evans, 2015). For these reasons, political analysis in the US tends to pay greater attention to race, and its interaction with gender, compared with studies in the UK. Similarly, this article highlights that it is also in the *practice* of politics, that we can see a difference of emphasis; specifically, that women's organisation pay closer attention to the representation of women of colour in the US than they do in the UK.

Gender and politics scholars have become increasingly aware of the need to address intersectionality in their analyses of political representation (Hancock, 2014). As Mügge and Erzeel (forthcoming) observe, an intersectional framework allows us to understand the power dynamics underpinning the various mechanisms at work in the political recruitment process; moreover, it can help reveal identities that are particularly advantaged or disadvantaged by formal and informal representational norms and values. To date, gender and race has been the principle intersection that has been studied; in particular the under-representation of women of colour (Htun, 2004; Hughes, 2011; Minta, 2012; Strolovitch, 2006; Reingold and Smith, 2012). Studies in the US have suggested that women of colour have more electoral ambition than white women (Moore, 2005) with women of colour making the majority of electoral gains made by women in recent years (Hardy-Fanta et al, 2006). Moreover, research has highlighted that ethnic minority women have been particularly successful relative to ethnic minority men (see Mügge, forthcoming) although it is highly assimilated women who symbolise the acceptable face of diversity that do best (see Murray, forthcoming). On the other hand, studies have also shown that white men are the least likely to support a black female candidate (Philpott and Walton, 2007), that black

women, and poor black women especially, are the worst represented (Strolovitch, 2006), whilst Muslim ethnic minority women are under-represented relative to Muslim ethnic minority men in both the US and UK (Hughes, forthcoming). In the UK, research has highlighted that women of colour have been helped by party strategies, including: the Labour party's use of all women shortlists (AWS), although up until 2005 this was not the case (Nugent and Krook, 2015); and through the Conservative party's creation of an 'A' list of candidates from which local associations were encouraged to select, and which included a large number of women and ethnic minorities (Sobolewska, 2013). However, we know little about the electoral ambitions of women of colour in the UK, again reflecting the relative paucity of literature exploring the interaction between gender and race in the UK.

Scant attention has been paid to the intersection between gender and other identity characteristics (for analysis of the intersection between gender and old age see Randall, forthcoming). This article develops the empirical analysis of intersectionality and political representation to encompass other identity markers - age, disability and sexuality - all of which constitute protected characteristics in law. The research explores whether some or all of these identities form part of the campaigns to increase the number of women politicians. The article highlights three main points: 1) some groups of women are particularly under-represented; women of colour are under-represented, although they are better represented in the US than in the UK, whilst women with disabilities are under-represented in the US and UK, and younger women are under-represented in the former and older women in the latter; 2) US women's organisations have a greater awareness of the need to promote diversity amongst women politicians, in particular women of colour; and 3) despite the emphasis on women of colour in the US, partisan and non-partisan women's campaign

groups in both countries prioritise increasing the overall number of women in office rather than improving the diversity of women politicians. The article concludes that a failure to address diversity amongst women will undermine arguments for women's representation if only *some* women are seen to benefit. This article concurs with Anne Phillips' analysis that applying intersectionality to political representation is a 'daunting challenge' (2012) but also agrees with Smooth that it is a 'mess worth making' (2006); one vital to increasing and improving women's representation.

1 Methods

This article provides a paired comparative study of the US and UK. A paired comparative approach is adopted to provide 'intimacy of analysis' that is derived from rich descriptive data (Tarrow, 2010: 243), this is particularly important for exploring the nuances surrounding approaches to diversity and for addressing the comparative effects of the mechanisms underpinning the political recruitment process (Mügge and Erzeel, forthcoming). The US and UK have a number of similarities which make for a useful comparison: they both have changing demographics, with ethnic minorities making up an increasing percentage of the electorate; at the aggregate level women are under-represented; both use majoritarian electoral systems; and, both have active women's organisations which campaign for an increase to women's political representation.

The research has two questions: firstly, how diverse are the women that serve in the current House of Commons and Congress? The article answers this by setting out the comparative data according to ethnicity, sexuality, age and known disability. These identity markers were

selected for four reasons: 1) they are designated protected characteristics and so constitute important aspects of the diversity agenda; 2) they are politically salient intersections that address a range of marginalised groups, not all of whom receive much critical attention - in particular women with disabilities; 3) ageism, homophobia and ableism continue to be a problem at the structural and cultural level which requires legislation; and 4) we can identify specific policy issues that have particular significance for these groups: e.g. care for the elderly and pensions have clear relevance for older people whilst access to education and training is of concern for younger people; people with disabilities have an interest in issues of access or transportation; whilst debates concerning same sex marriage or adoption laws are important to the LGBT community. A dataset of women MPs and Congresswomen was compiled which captures data on individual women's ethnicity, age, sexuality and disability; this involved collecting biographical information via politician's websites, and cross-referencing with existing reports of aggregate data, where these exist.¹

The obvious missing category is class. Although class has an important role to play in determining whether a woman will run for office, because of the need for financial independence, social capital and stability (Paxton and Hughes, 2007), it is difficult to get reliable information on the social class of politicians. In part this is due to the fluid nature of class but also because there are a wide range of indicators which could be used to measure it. As such, it is excluded from this analysis. Of course to some extent all identity markers are open to individual interpretation and construction (Marx Ferree, 2009) and for this research there was some difficulty in obtaining reliable data for 'unseen' identities such as disability

¹ With thanks to Professor Andrew Reynolds of the University of North Carolina for checking and clarifying the data on LGBT politicians.

and sexuality. Although some aggregate data exists concerning the number of LGBT politicians in the US this was not broken down by sex, moreover it is not monitored by the Equality and Diversity Unit in the House of Commons. Additionally, many disabilities remain hidden and so the data recorded below refers to those who self-identify as having a disability. It is worth noting that this information was more readily available in the US, where arguably there is a greater emphasis on identity politics than in the UK.

The article also draws upon analysis of the campaigns adopted by partisan groups to increase the number of women politicians as well as eight qualitative interviews undertaken with representatives of national women's organisations,² in order to answer the article's second question: what role does diversity play in the campaigns run by political parties and women's organisations to increase the number of elected women? The interviews were conducted in London, New York, and Washington DC where the headquarters of the organisations were located. The interviews occurred between January 2012 and March 2014, and lasted between 45 minutes and an hour and were all fully transcribed. All interviewees were guaranteed anonymity. Participants were asked about their organisation's campaigns to increase women's representation and the extent to which they focused on the diversity of women. During the interviews I followed up on any of the sub groups (age, ethnicity, sexuality, or disability) that had not been mentioned to explore whether they constituted a specific focus. In discussing their campaigns there was a danger that interviewees might seek to exaggerate the extent to which diversity featured in their

² The interviews undertaken for this research were part of a wider project exploring feminist politics, as anonymity was guaranteed to all participants a list of those organisations who participated is not included in this article.

work in order to appear progressive, however, as the data revealed below illustrates, this was not the case. The exploration of the approaches of the main political parties towards diversity amongst women was based on analysis of websites and the publications produced for campaigns around women's representation.

2 How Diverse are Women in the House of Commons and Congress?

Women are under-represented in the 2013 US Congress and 2015 House of Commons: in Congress there are 99 women – making up 18% of the House of Representatives and 20% of the Senate; whilst in the Commons there are 191 women, 28% of all MPs.³

As the data in Table 1 below illustrates, party differences in the number and percentage of women is striking with the leftist parties 'ahead' in both countries. Of the 99 women in the 113th Congress, 76 are Democrat (77%) and 23 are Republican (23%); whilst of the 191 women MPs in the House of Commons, 99 are Labour (52%), 68 are Conservative (36%), 20 are Scottish Nationalist Party (SNP) (10%) and 4 are from smaller parties (2%).

Table 1 here

One way of measuring the descriptive representativeness of an institution is to compare it with the general population; although this may appear to be a high threshold it is a useful indicator, not least because scholars, the media and civil society groups often use such

³ This article focusses only on the House of Commons as the UK's nationally elected legislative body, the House of Lords (where women make up 23%) is not considered because it is an unelected chamber. Data does not include delegates from Guam or the Virgin Islands but does include Washington. The total number of Congressmen and women is 535. Total number of MPs is 650.

comparisons in their campaigns for increased descriptive representation.⁴ Turning firstly to race, women of colour make up 36% of the US female population and 30% percent of Congresswomen.⁵ In the UK, women of colour make up roughly 14% of the female population and 9% of female MPs.⁶ Hence, women of colour are under-represented in both legislatures relative to their percentage of the population: they are under-represented by 6% in the US and by 5% in the UK.

The US Census Bureau estimates that 18% of all women in the US have a disability and yet they make up just 1% of congresswomen.⁷ In the UK it is claimed that around 16% of the female population are disabled and yet the 2015 Parliament contains no women with disabilities.⁸ The data therefore reveals that women with disabilities are seriously under-represented in both the US and UK.

⁴ See for instance the Humphrey School of Public Affairs' analysis of African American representation, accessed at http://blog.lib.umn.edu/cspg/smartpolitics/2011/01/african_americans_still_dreami.php on 24 October 2014 and the UK's Fawcett Society's 50/50 campaign for gendered representation, accessed at <http://www.fawcettsociety.org.uk/our-work/campaigns/women-power/> on 24 October 2014.

⁵ For statistical data on women of colour in the US, accessed at <http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/women/report/2014/03/07/85457/fact-sheet-the-womens-leadership-gap/> on 22 September 2014

⁶ See the 2011 UK Census on ethnicity, accessed at <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/census/2011-census/population-and-household-estimates-for-the-united-kingdom/stb-2011-census--population-estimates-for-the-united-kingdom.html> on 22 September 2014.

⁷ US Census, accessed at <http://www.census.gov/people/disability/publications/sipp2010.html> on 19 September 2014.

⁸ UK Census on disability, accessed at <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/taxonomy/index.html?nscl=Disability+and+Self-reported+Health> on 19 September 2014. See also The Disability News Service, accessed at <http://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/new-parliament-sees-number-of-disabled-mps-plunge/> on 22 May 2015

Turning to sexuality, the UK estimates regarding the LGBT population range from 1.5% projected by the Office for National Statistics to the 6% claimed by the Treasury, meanwhile gay rights charity Stonewall estimate it at somewhere between 5-7% with largely equal numbers of men and women.⁹ If we take the total LGBT population in the UK to be 6% and half of those are women, i.e. 3%, then we can see that in the House of Commons the number of LGBT female MPs at 3% appears to be representative of the wider population. In the US, LGBT women also make up roughly 3% of the female population but 2% of all Congresswomen, hence, despite the low numbers the data suggests that LGBT women are slightly under-represented in the US but not in the UK; although given the very low numbers involved we should avoid drawing any strong conclusions from this data.¹⁰

Turning to age, the median age for women in the UK is 40 whilst in the US it is 38.5.¹¹ The data from Table 1 highlights that women politicians are older than the female population in both countries. A straightforward comparison is problematic because census data includes all women, including those too young to stand for election. That said, as Figure 1 below highlights, women politicians are older in the US than in the UK - by an average of 9.3 years.

⁹ The Guardian 'Gay Britain: What do the Statistics Say', accessed at <http://www.theguardian.com/politics/reality-check/2013/oct/03/gay-britain-what-do-statistics-say> on 3 November 2014.

¹⁰ The numbers for this are based upon a study which highlighted that 53% of the 9 million strong LGBT population of the US are women, this was then worked out as a percentage of total female population, accessed at <http://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/research/census-lgbt-demographics-studies/how-many-people-are-lesbian-gay-bisexual-and-transgender/> and <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/00000.html> on 3 November 2014

¹¹ See <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/census/2011-census/population-estimates-by-single-year-of-age-and-sex-for-local-authorities-in-the-united-kingdom/index.html> and <http://www.census.gov/population/age/> both accessed 22nd September.

Figure 1 about here

Closer analysis of the data reveals that the youngest Congresswoman is 32, with only 5 women under the age of 40. Conversely, in the UK, 6 MPs are under the age of 30, with a further 28 between the ages of 30 and 39. At the other end of the spectrum the oldest Congresswoman is 84, with 15 Congresswomen over the age of 70; whilst in the UK, the oldest women MP is 78 with 4 MPs over the age of 70.

What can legislative composition analysis tell us about which groups of women are present?

Firstly, women of colour are under-represented in both legislatures, although they are better represented in the US compared to the UK. More specifically, those women of colour who are present are more likely to be found representing leftist parties; this in itself should not be all that surprising given that women of colour in the US have traditionally supported the Democrats and ethnic minority supporters have long supported Labour (Greenberg, 2001; Sanders et al, 2014). Such a pattern likely affects the potential supply pool of women of colour willing to run for office on behalf of a centre right party. That women of colour should be better represented in the US relative to the UK anticipates the greater emphasis and priority placed upon facilitating access to political power, and visibility, of women of colour by women's organisations within US politics compared to the UK (discussed in further detail below). Secondly, women with disabilities are seriously under-represented. The barriers facing women with disabilities are perhaps more complex than those facing other women; particularly overcoming assumptions on the part of the selectorate regarding their ability to 'do the job'. Thirdly, the percentage of LGBT women reflects their percentage of the UK, but not US, population; as with women of colour they are more likely to be found

representing the leftist parties (the recent election of three LGBT SNP women in the UK is largely responsible for improving the representativeness in the UK). On the surface this finding suggests that, at least in the UK, LGBT women do not appear to be as disadvantaged in the political recruitment process as women with disabilities or women of colour; although the low numbers of LGBT women means that any conclusions drawn are necessarily tentative. And lastly, younger women appear to be under-represented in the US compared to the UK, whilst older women are better represented in the US. It is in relation to age and political representation that we can identify the effects of the different formal criteria in the political recruitment process: with a minimum age of 18 required for the House of Commons and 25 and 30 for the House of Representatives and Senate respectively. Whilst, younger women are less likely to have accrued the significant individual resources required for standing for office in the US, older women are often constrained by physical limitations and inflexibility (Randall, forthcoming). To explore what is being done to improve the representativeness of women politicians and how this compares between the US and UK, the article now considers the extent to which diversity is part of the campaigns to increase women's numerical representation.

3 What role does diversity play in campaigns to increase women's representation?

Despite differences in political recruitment processes, women of colour and women with disabilities are under-represented in both systems. In the US, with the primary selection system and a strong incumbency bias, there are fewer opportunities for political parties or women's organisations to manipulate the process and outcome, although organisations and campaign donors can help fund individual candidates (Darcy, Welch and Clarke, 1994).

Meanwhile, in the UK, local parties can be guided by the centre to select more diverse candidates, or can direct local parties to adopt a sex based quota in order to guarantee the selection of a woman (Ashe et al, 2010), whilst the UK government introduced an Access to Elected Office fund for Disabled People (with 2.6m available) this does not appear to have benefited women with disabilities. With the absence of any formal (or at least effective) avenues to support and encourage diverse groups of women, women's organisations, both partisan and non-partisan, have a potentially important role to play. It is to these groups that this article now turns in order to consider whether diversity is a core feature of their work.

3.1 The role of partisan women's organisations

In the US organisations, with sufficient funds can provide significant support for candidates;¹² this has potentially important implications for increasing the diversity of women elected if women with disabilities and/or women of colour are recipients of such support. Perhaps the US's most high profile partisan women's group that seeks to increase the number of women is EMILY's List (Early Money is Like Yeast), which promotes and helps fund the election of pro-choice Democrat women.¹³ Conversely, The WISH list (Women in the Senate and House), the Republican equivalent, is neither as well known nor as powerful

¹² The differences in terms of electoral spending in the US and UK is significant. Following the Citizen's United ruling it was deemed to be in violation of the first amendment to place a cap on donations. In the UK electoral funding regulations place a limit on the amount that candidates can spend.

¹³ EMILY's List was created in 1985 in order to help fund pro-choice women candidates. Since then they have expanded their remit to include the recruitment of candidates and the mobilization of voters. See their mission statement, accessed at <http://emilyslist.org/who/mission> on 1 July 2014.

within its own party (Day and Hadley, 2002).¹⁴ EMILY's List claims to champion diversity as part of its core mission, whilst their blog aggregator includes links to discussions about how specific groups of women negotiate the candidate nomination and election process.¹⁵ The WISH List makes no mention of diversity in their mission statement or with regards their training programmes.

Due to the differences in campaign finance regulation, there are no direct UK equivalents; instead the impetus and training for women comes specifically from women's groups within the political parties. From analysis of the work of the partisan women's groups, it is apparent that some pay more attention to diversity than others. The Labour Women's Network, which runs training events for aspirant women candidates, monitor and seek to promote diversity amongst the women they train, highlighting the importance of ethnic minority women and women with disabilities.¹⁶ Conversely, the Conservative Women2Win group, which campaigns to elect more women to Parliament, makes no reference to diversity amongst women on their website.

A commitment to diversity amongst women (at least at the rhetorical level) appears only to be of concern to leftist partisan women's groups. This finding is instructive insofar as it

¹⁴ WISH List was established in 1982 to recruit and help fund the campaigns of 'mainstream' Republican women to all levels of political office. In addition to fundraising activities they are also involved in the identification and recruitment of potential candidates, accessed at <http://www.thewishlist.org/> on 1 July 2014.

¹⁵ See for instance the piece about black female candidates, accessed at <http://blog.emilyslist.org/post/94561502171/black-female-candidates-face-different-challenges-some> on 22 September 2014.

¹⁶ Access and Diversity data listed on the Labour Women's Network website, accessed at http://www.lwn.org.uk/access_diversity on 22 September 2014.

reinforces previous research which has found that leftist parties are those that have been most receptive to the campaigns for greater equality and for the greater representation of women (Young, 2000). Finally, there is no reference to age in any of the campaigns – either in terms of increasing the number of younger or older women.

3.2 Non-partisan women's organisations

Leading women's civil society organisations who campaign on women's representation typically provide at least a nod to the importance of encouraging and empowering a diverse range of women to run for office. For instance the Fawcett Society, the UK's largest women's civil society organisation, note in their Women and Power campaign that the 'barriers are even greater for ethnic minority women and women from other marginalised groups such as women with disabilities, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender women and women from lower socio-economic backgrounds.'¹⁷ Whilst Feminist Majority, a leading women's organisation in the US, promotes 'non-discrimination on the basis of sex, race, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, religion, ethnicity, age, marital status, nation of origin, size or disability' offering a comparatively wider range of identity markers.¹⁸ For both of these organisations the explicit recognition of the importance of diversity is clear, however it is less obvious the extent to which that translates into specific strategies; an issue to which the article now turns.

¹⁷ The Fawcett Society 'Women and Power' report, accessed at <http://www.fawcettsociety.org.uk/our-work/issues/power-influence/> on 19 September 2014.

¹⁸ Feminist Majority, accessed at <http://feministmajority.org/about/> on 19 September 2014.

During the interviews with women's organisations, participants were asked how they addressed the need for diversity amongst women politicians. Interviewees in both the US and UK admitted that this was an area in which they had not yet achieved the desired results but that they were committed to ensuring greater heterogeneity amongst women legislators:

Well, we're very conscious of the need to increase the number of women of colour in Congress and will try to do everything we can to specifically help those women run and win - whether that's through specific training or through leadership programmes (Washington DC)

Yes, I think it's really important to have more diversity amongst women elected. We know that black and ethnic minority women are particularly under-represented in our system and we try to make sure that we push this with the parties. (London)

As the above quotations illustrate, the intersection between gender and race framed their responses to the question of diversity. In other words, diversity was interpreted as being about the need to increase the number of women of colour, rather than any other identity category. Certainly in the US this should come as no surprise given the specific and historic role that race plays in politics. The respondents discussed how it was an issue that they tried to promote through their own campaigns and interactions with the political parties. For instance, amongst the US interviewees there was an awareness of the particular impact that race would have on access to networks and money; here the intersection between socio-economic background, race and gender was considered in terms of barriers to elected office.

We have to think very carefully about how we can help women of colour access the right support to enable them to run. So we need to think about structural, historical and cultural disadvantage and try to help address those inequalities whether that's with targeted fundraising or personal development. (New York).

This attention to the historic and structural imbalances facing women of colour was not as clearly articulated during the UK interviews. None of the UK participants sought to make links between race and class or to situate that discussion within the broader social context; moreover, there was not the same attention paid to the potential inaccessibility of important networks, due to historic disadvantage.

In discussing race, interviewees in both the US and UK highlighted specific training sessions and the creation of mentoring and leadership opportunities that were explicitly targeted at women of colour. There was a growing awareness amongst the interviewees of the need to adapt more generic training events to specifically address the need of black and ethnic minority women. For some in the UK, there was a desire to see the all women shortlist model adapted to include ethnic minority women as part of a quota, as articulated by one interviewee: 'I'd like to see Labour's AWS take greater account of ethnicity, especially in constituencies where there is a large ethnic minority population.' In the US there was also a recognition of the importance for Congresswomen to reflect the racial diversity of their

district whilst also guarding against, as one interviewee put it, the ‘ghettoisation’ of black congresswomen.¹⁹

The interviewees also discussed the importance of role models, in particular for women of colour to see successful black women taking on leadership roles. The symbolic value of having high profile black women in positions of power was thought to be an important part of ‘normalising’ the image of black woman as politician. Several interviewees named particular politicians such as Donna Edwards or Diane Abbott, as being critical to the wider project of improving diversity in politics. There was also the idea, notably in the US, that hearing such women talk about their own personal journey to elected office was a powerful means by which to encourage and motivate other women of colour to put themselves forward. In the US groups such as the Democratic African American Women Caucus were also cited as being particularly important in terms of their mentoring activity. Several of the interviewees made explicit links between increasing the presence of women of colour and improving the representation of their interests; such a link was particularly noteworthy given that this was not the case during the discussions surrounding other groups of women.

Turning to age, interviewees in both the US and UK articulated the need to encourage younger women to run for office (there was no mention of older women by any of the interviewees). All the US participants identified the importance of providing leadership training programmes for young women:

¹⁹ Research in the US has long-noted that African American office holders tend to represent constituencies in which African Americans constitute a significant proportion of the electorate (for further analysis see Highton, 2004)

It's vital that we lay the foundations for young women so that when they're ready to run, they're confident in their leadership qualities and abilities (Washington DC).

We need to take care that our young women are well prepared and know that nothing is off limits for them. We've got to make sure that future generations of women want to run for office and see that this is something worth doing (New York).

Ensuring a future supply pool of women candidates was considered critical by the US interviewees. It was striking that young women were not considered to be a group who required descriptive representation; rather they were considered in terms of their potential to act as future leaders. For instance there was no discussion of the fact that women under 40 are virtually absent from Congress and what that might mean in terms of the representation of their interests. Meanwhile in the UK, where younger women are better represented, there was no discussion of the need for specific training or outreach programmes.

Neither sexuality nor disability were mentioned by the majority of the interviewees until asked about them. Only one of the interviewees (Washington DC) mentioned sexuality, but only briefly and did not go into further detail: 'We need to make sure that we get all sorts of women you know? We want more women of colour, we want more gay women bi women.' Whilst the discussions concerning women of colour had been specific, both in terms of particular challenges but also the programmes being adopted and the justification for increased representation, the other identity groups were considered more in terms of

individual assistance, this was particularly true for discussions around supporting and encouraging candidates with disabilities:

We want a level playing field and will do our best to help with specific needs, it's vitally important that women with disabilities feel that they can go for selection (London)

Of course we want all women to feel able to run for office and we support women who have access issues or who maybe need extra assistance (New York)

Whereas, discussions about women's descriptive representation at the aggregate level tended to be couched in terms of equality of outcome rather than equality of opportunity, the reverse was true when talking about women with disabilities. Here the discussions centred more upon how women with disabilities could be helped to stand for election.

Whilst all of the interviewees noted that diversity of women was important, it was also clear that this was not seen as being as much of a priority as increasing the overall numbers of women elected:

I see our job as getting more pro-choice women elected. That is our ultimate aim and I think people get that. (Washington DC)

When we talk about women's representation we do know that we need to think more carefully about issues like trans-inclusion but at the end of the day women are so under represented that we need to almost tackle that first. (London)

Of course, we care who the women are but we also need the numbers (New York)

Whilst there was no sense from the interviewees that an emphasis on diversity was a distraction, it was clear that by focussing on the overall numbers of women present they felt that they were able to articulate a clearer message. It would be a stretch to claim that existing campaigns run by national women's organisations to increase the number of women elected had diversity amongst women at their core. The emphasis remains on aggregate numbers and percentages of women rather than on which types of women are elected. From the campaigners themselves there was recognition of the need to take diversity seriously but the interpretation of diversity was rather limited. Whilst specific attention was paid to the representation of women of colour and the need to train younger women in the US, this was not evident in the UK.

4 Conclusion

This article has highlighted that certain groups of women are under-represented: women of colour and women with disabilities in the US and UK; younger women in the US and older women in the UK. Meanwhile, beyond the focus on women of colour and younger women in the US, little attention is paid to the issue of improving the diversity amongst women politicians; partly due to an overriding desire to see the overall number of women politicians increase. The differences between the US and UK, illustrates the divergent strategies that

can be adopted to increase the *aggregate* number of women, for instance through the use of AWS; however, the similarities in terms of the under-representation of specific groups of women suggests a commonality in terms of the extent to which certain women are able, and encouraged, to stand for office.

Women's groups in the US are more aware of the need to promote diversity amongst women politicians; this is particularly the case with regards women of colour. Indeed, the issue of racial diversity is the principle intersecting identity through which discussions of diversity are framed. Within the UK, there is relatively less attention paid to the issue of diversity; it is certainly true that the historical legacy of slavery has meant that race plays a more significant role in US politics which perhaps goes some way towards explaining this difference. Moreover, in the US there is a greater awareness of the structural and cultural power inequalities at work than in the UK – something illustrated by the interviews for this research.

It is clear that further work is needed to explore the specific experiences and challenges facing different groups of women as they negotiate the various mechanisms underpinning the political recruitment process, in particular women with disabilities. This article has focussed on the extent to which partisan and non-partisan women's groups focus on diversity; future research should investigate the experiences of women with disabilities in particular as they attempt to navigate the formal rules and informal norms that underpin the political recruitment process. Moreover, comparative studies will allow us to better understand the extent to which cultural and societal constructions of specific groups of women affects both supply and demand.

Attempts to improve the diversity of the national legislature remain a 'political minefield' (Mügge and Erzeel, forthcoming), and yet it is an important political project for reasons of justice and equality. Likewise, it will require creative thinking, a critical analysis of power and issues of accessibility in order to improve the diversity amongst women, whilst retaining a focus on increasing the overall number of women. If diversity is not addressed, and only some women are seen to benefit, then this has potentially damaging implications for the case for group representation.

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